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FROM THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.

[Correspondence of the New York Times.]

HEADQUARTERS LEFT WING OF ARMY, Tuesday, Dec. 23.—The Army of the Potomac is not going into winter quarters. Though operations in front may be abandoned, the troops are not to remain cooped up in winter huts through the long weeks which intervene between now and March. A portion of the soldiers may be sent to Washington to prevent a backward movement of the enemy in that direction, while the remainder are shipped southward to commence operations anew on the Peninsula. Perhaps it may appear best to our Generals to cross the Rappahannock further down, say at Port Conway—under the protection of our gunboats, and again give battle to the enemy. Should we desire to do so, it would be, as a general remarked to me to-day, almost impossible to winter the army in this locality, owing to the scarcity of wood.

CENTRE GRAND DIVISION, ARMY OF POTOMAC, Monday, Dec. 22.—The supposition expressed by many that the Confederates are not in strong force on the Fredericksburg side of the river, has been proven to-day to be without foundation. A reconnoissance made this morning resulted in the discovery of a large body of the enemy directly in our front; also another force a little to our right. An unlimited number of Confederate tents has sprung up to view within the past two days, and not a few log huts have been built. All the enemy's fortifications are well garrisoned.

From Winchester.

Col. Keys, who came from Romney, took possession of Winchester on Tuesday morning. The Confederate pickets there, left. Gen. Jones, with 2,500 men, had occupied the place the week previous, but had left, going towards Staunton. Milroy's forces were at Middletown, approaching Winchester. The Winchester Railroad has been entirely destroyed and the iron carried off. There is great destitution in Winchester. The common necessities of life are at famine prices, and hardly procurable at that.

The object in spiking a gun is very generally misapprehended by persons ignorant of military details. It is not intended to utterly destroy the piece, but to render it useless for the time being, in case the gunners are forced to abandon it. To this end rat-tail files, patent spikes and a variety of different articles are used: these are, in nearly every instance, removed when the danger is past.

A dispatch from Newbern, North Carolina, December 17, states that two candidates are running for Congress in that district—one upon the free labor platform, and the other in opposition to confiscation and emancipation. The success of the latter is predicted.

It is provided for in the advertisements for proposals for erecting new buildings at the Camp of Paroled and Exchanged prisoners near Alexandria, "that proposals from disloyal parties will not be considered, and an oath of allegiance must accompany each proposition."

PROCLAMATION CONCERNING GEN. BUTLER.

The Washington Chronicle, of this morning, contains in full the proclamation of Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States, in relation to Gen. Butler and the officers under his command. It has been received in a Richmond paper, just brought in to the Federal lines by a sutler, who obtained it from a Confederate picket. The proclamation commences by enumerating the efforts made to obtain an answer to the inquiry concerning the alleged execution of Wm. B. Mumford, in N. Orleans, for having pulled down a U. S. flag in that city previous to its occupation by the Federal troops, and the failure to obtain an official reply. It then goes on to say:

"And whereas, in addition to the tacit admission, resulting from the above refusal to answer, I have received evidence fully establishing the truth of the fact that the said Wm. B. Mumford, a citizen of the Confederacy, was actually and publicly executed in cold blood by hanging, after the occupation of the city of N. Orleans by the forces under Gen. Benjamin F. Butler, when said Mumford was an unresisting and non-combatant captive, and for no offence even alleged to have been committed by him subsequent to the date of the capture of said city:

"And whereas, the silence of the government of the United States, and its maintaining of said Butler in high office under its authority, for many months after his commission of an act that can be viewed in no other light than as a deliberate murder, as well as of numerous other outrages and atrocities hereafter to be mentioned, afford evidence too conclusive that the said government sanctions the conduct of said Butler, and is determined that he shall remain unpunished for the crimes:

"Now, therefore, I, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, and in their name, do pronounce and declare the said Benjamin F. Butler to be a felon, deserving of capital punishment. I do order that he be no longer considered or treated simply as a public enemy of the Confederate States of America, but as an outlaw and common enemy of mankind, and that in the event of his capture, the officer in command of the capturing force do cause him to be immediately executed by hanging; and I do further order that no commissioned officer of the United States, taken captive, shall be released on parole before exchange until the said Butler shall have met with due punishment for his crimes."

The proclamation then enumerates all the alleged sufferings of the people of New Orleans, under the rule of Gen. Butler, such as insults to women, making captives of peaceable citizens, confiscation of property, extorted oaths, &c., &c., in addition to which are specially mentioned the proceedings in relation to the negroes, and concludes as follows:

"Now, therefore, I, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America, and acting by their authority, appealing to the Divine Judge in attestation that their conduct is not guided by the passion of revenge, but that they reluctantly yield to the solemn duty of repressing, by necessary severity, crimes of which their citizens are the victims, do issue this my proclamation, and by virtue of my authority as commander-in-chief of the armies of the Confederate States, do order:

"1st. That all commissioned officers in the

command of said Benjamin F. Butler be declared not entitled to be considered as soldiers engaged in honorable warfare, but as robbers and criminals, deserving death; and that they and each of them be, whenever captured, reserved for execution.

"3d. That the private soldiers and non-commissioned officers in the army of said Butler be considered as only the instruments used for the commission of the crimes perpetrated by his orders, and not as free agents; that they therefore be treated, when captured, as prisoners of war, with kindness and humanity, and be sent home on the usual parole that they will in no manner aid or serve the United States in any capacity during the continuance of this war, unless duly exchanged.

"3d. That all negro slaves captured in arms be at once delivered over to the Executive authorities of the respective States to which they belong, to be dealt with according to the laws of said States.

"4th. That the like orders be executed in all cases with respect to all commissioned officers of the United States, when found serving in company with said slaves in insurrection against the authorities of the different States of this Confederacy."

THE WAR IN THE WEST AND SOUTH.—It appears, from a dispatch, that the Confederates have gotten in the rear of Gen. Grant's army in Mississippi. On Friday night of last week they approached Holly Springs in force, and attacked the Federal garrison there. A short resistance was made, but the Federal troops were soon overpowered and compelled to surrender. Their loss is reported at two hundred killed and wounded, and one hundred and fifty taken prisoners. The Confederates burned a quantity of cotton, beside U. S. government stores valued at half a million of dollars. Their force is supposed to be fifty thousand, commanded by Gen. Van Dorn. The main body of the Federal army, at last accounts, was at Granada, sixty miles south of Holly Springs. The Federal army, under Gen. Sherman, had reached Helena, and were preparing to move down the river. Gen. Grant, it is also believed, will move towards Vicksburg. Helena is about fifty miles southwest from Holly Springs, and the same distance northwest of Granada.

A Confederate guerilla party visited the suburbs of Memphis on Sunday night last, and carried off considerable property. The town of Union City and the bridge over Obion river, in Northwestern Tennessee, have been burned by the Confederates. It is reported that Jeff. Thompson is moving on New Madrid with twenty thousand men from Arkansas.

We see another interesting account of the recent operations of Gen. Foster in North Carolina. After the advance to Goldsboro' and the destruction of the railroads at that point, the expedition returned to Newbern, having accomplished the objects of the movement. Reports through Confederate sources say that the damages to their lines of communication will soon be repaired.

There are reports of negro insurrections in Missouri, and of movements of troops there to suppress negro movements.